

Double vision

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Romans 8 sharpens my eyes to see more clearly a hope I cannot see on my own. Paul has a way of encouraging me to peek over his shoulder. He shares his spectacles of faith so that I can see with him—through the immediate, into a wide-open country of all living hope. Paul's double vision allows him to see two realities at once: "I consider the sufferings of this present time not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

It's not that Paul is ignoring the present moment. He looks around and takes note. He sees suffering. Something is wrong, off-balanced. Nothing is as it was meant to be. Whatever is wrong is affecting even the deep down nature of things. Mother Earth groans like a woman in labor and longs to be set free in the cosmic restoration of all things.

Each of us groans with her. With Paul's first sight we see that suffering is universal and it doesn't discriminate. Because life has a way of dealing bad hands, we all experience irrational, unjustified, senseless sorrows. Paul sees that faith is not an insurance policy from the harsh realities of life.

I often feel this most keenly when, despite careful planning, everything changes in a moment. I get a word of the car accident with students involved. . . the doctor sits us down to explain the diagnosis. . . I open the e-mail from a friend. . . and nothing is ever the same.

At such moments I need Paul's second sight. Paul's double vision pushes me out of my presumed world. He points me to see a reality beyond my reality, a glory to frame my suffering, a hope to hold my cup of grief. This is not an invitation to escapism, or a second naiveté. It is a something else entirely. It is a world that sustains this one.

But Paul's second sight points me to the kingdom of God, where hope, not suffering, has the last word. Paul gives us binoculars to see into the expansive landscape of salvation, where the risen Jesus has inaugurated a new age of the Spirit that is breaking in upon us, proclaiming that even in suffering we are heirs of this brave new world of glory (Rom. 8:15-17). We are not living in a wasteland but in a rose garden where nature is never spent. (Compare T.S. Eliot's poem *The Wasteland*, written before his conversion, with *The Four Quartets*, in which Eliot describes the world as a rose garden. See also Gerard Manley Hopkins's "God's Grandeur," a poem that explores this double vision). Paul reminds us that we are not forgotten, that we are not abandoned, but adopted into the family of the Trinity, with full rights of the children of God.

This is the hope that saves. That we are not our own, but belong body and soul, to Jesus Christ. With his double vision, Paul helps me to see that even in suffering we are all living in a geography of hope. We long. We cry. We wait with patience in the midst of our current experience, but we do all this in the context of a grace whose circumference is larger than we can possibly imagine. This is the vision we need to remember. This is the vision of the church for a world that is blind.